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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Note verbale dated 24 November 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representative of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to forward herewith the Final Document of the Ministerial Meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Member States concerning Children in South Asia, held from 16 to 18 September 1992.

The Permanent Mission shall be grateful if the attached document is circulated for the information of delegations to the Third Committee at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Annex

COLOMBO RESOLUTION ON CHILDREN

PREAMBLE

1. Pursuant to the decision of the Sixth SAARC Summit, we the Ministers of SAARC member States and other representatives of government and the people, assembled in Colombo from 16 to 18 September 1992 on behalf of the 410 million children of South Asia.

2. Our meeting in Colombo follows the first SAARC Conference on South Asian Children in 1986 in New Delhi and the subsequent SAARC summits. Consequent upon these consultations within the SAARC framework there has been considerable regional cooperation in the area of child development and some improvement in the conditions of children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Summit for Children of 1990 and the respective national plans of action constitute our frame of reference for regional cooperation on a range of policy, legal, technical and operational issues.

3. We hereby reaffirm our commitment to the objectives and goals envisaged in our national plans of action, drawn up within the overall framework of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. We pledge to cooperate with each other in the region for the survival, development and protection of the South Asian child. We consider this to be an integral part of, and a first charge on our respective Governments' efforts at improving the lives of the people of the region.

THE CHALLENGE

4. A quarter of the world's children live in South Asia. Every day, many of the children of our region are exposed to the scourge of poverty and economic deprivation. Every day, many of them still needlessly die or suffer from diseases caused by lack of clean drinking water or inadequate sanitation. Of the 35 million children born each year, over 5 million die before the age of five. The majority of the survivors, particularly girls, do not develop to a fraction of their potential. About a quarter of maternal deaths in the world occur in South Asia.

5. The unacceptable health, nutrition, education and social conditions for a large proportion of children and their exposure to abuse, violence and environmental hazards, and assumption of adult responsibilities, like motherhood at a tender age, child labour and child trafficking, are some of the most urgent challenges in the region. Child trafficking, particularly, urgently calls for both bilateral as well as regional cooperation. Children in difficult circumstances, such as those disabled, orphaned or abandoned, have special needs which have to be met. These are challenges that South Asia's political leaders must face.

THE OPPORTUNITY

6. In the traditional sociocultural environment of South Asia, the value placed on children is a common uniting factor among the nations of the region. We have today the means and the knowledge to greatly diminish the suffering of children, to promote their full development and to make them aware of their rights. The national plan of action which has been prepared by each Government provides the means for removing obstacles to the improvement of the condition of our children.

7. There is a wealth of experience in every country of the region in child development and related spheres. We have experience of success in many parts of the region. Government and non-governmental organizations have already demonstrated results depite financial constraints and other impediments.

8. The goals for children can be achieved in quality and in time if, and only if, the institutional arrangements, organizational requirements and resource commitments are more specifically identified and better assured, in a joint endeavour by all segments of society within each country, and between the countries of South Asia. In a development perspective, the 410 million children constitute South Asia.

TASKS AHEAD

9. We renew our commitment to achieving the seven major goals and the cluster of essential supportive goals for South Asia as contained in our respective national plans of action. In doing so, we emphasize the close interlinkages among them, and between them and social concerns like protection of the natural life-support system, economic opportunities, gender equality and poverty reduction. The greater, therefore, is the need to approach the goals at two levels:

(a) The tasks should be defined in manageable terms to be achieved in a sequential build-up of inter-goal momentum, according to country-specific and community-specific need and urgency;

(b) Concurrently, intercountry cooperation should enhance the feasibility of achieving goals which emerge as priorities.

10. We recognize that goals which were considered difficult have proved attainable by concerted action by the Government and the community. The experience gained in providing safe water and in universal immunization gives us the confidence that the goals, however formidable they appear, are amenable to phased action.

11. We urge that the national plans of action be reinforced in a regional perspective by taking into consideration the following set of illustrative goals in order to catalyse and accelerate progress towards the achievement of the seven major as well as the supportive goals. Some of these goals are:

(a) Basic education:

- Access to, and enrolment in primary education for at least 80 per cent of boys and 75 per cent of girls, and completion of primary education by at least 50 per cent of girls as well as boys by 1995;

- Reduction of adult and adolescent illiteracy from the 1990 levels by 25 per cent by 1995;

(b) Diarrhoea control: universal use of oral rehydration therapy for home-based treatment of diarrhoea and universal access to oral rehydration salts by 1996;

(c) Iodine deficiency disorders: universal access to iodized salt by 1995;

(d) Reducing gender disparity: progressive reduction of gender disparity in all the goal-related indicators;

(e) Family size:

- Raising the minimum female age of marriage to at least 18 years;

- Access to family planning services in order to increase contraceptive prevalence levels by 50 per cent from the current rate by the year 2000;

(f) Child labour: progressive and accelerated elimination of child labour;

(g) Drinking water: access to safe drinking water to not less than three fourths of both rural and urban population by 1996 and universal access by 2000;

(h) Guinea worm disease: eradication by 1995;

(i) Immunization: reducing vaccine-preventable disease, and elimination of neonatal tetanus by 1995 and eradication of poliomyelitis by 2000;

(j) Maternal mortality: reduction of the maternal mortality ratio by half of the 1990 level;

(k) Nutrition: between 1990 and the year 2000, reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among under-five children by half;

(l) Sanitation: double current levels of access to sanitary means of excreta disposal by 1996.

STRATEGIES

12. Strategies for achieving the goals for children should be integral to the total development strategy. This would include devolution of power to local government bodies, increasing the proportion of resources allocated to human development, reduction of poverty and organizing and empowering communities to meet basic needs. The cluster of goals for children including operational strategies should fit into this overall approach.

13. Human development, of which the goals for children are central, requires, in the South Asian context, a development strategy which would provide an alternative to the conventional pathway to economic growth. Current policy shifts towards the free market economy and structural adjustments require expansion of social safety programmes for children and women. The macroeconomic strategy needs to be supplemented with a simultaneous, parallel, pro-poor plan and strategy of community organization.

14. The political system should provide space for community-led local planning. The central principle of community-Government partnership in a common cause has to be deliberately promoted. Towards this aim two steps are essential:

(a) Communities, especially of the poor and involving the effective participation of women, have to be assisted in mobilizing, empowering and activating themselves as viable groups in responding to the needs of children;

(b) A system of effective local self-government has to be in place in order to take charge of both responsibilities and resources for achieving the community's goals for children. Powers required for this purpose must devolve to the local level.

15. Advocacy programmes have to be developed through media and other resources, so that families, communities, professionals and non-governmental organizations can be motivated towards the goals for the survival, development and protection of children.

16. To achieve maximum effectiveness there should be special focus on difficult and disadvantaged areas wehre services for children should be directed to the most needy.

17. In order to improve programme implementation optimal use of existing resources - financial, technical and managerial - should be ensured so as to reduce duplication, overlap and wastage.

18. The member States should formulate an annual action plan on major goals and supporting goals, disaggregated by compact administrative units. They should share experiences in addressing common problems, finding solutions and developing methods of effective implementation. We urge each country to annually review and update the annual action plan as a dynamic tool of country-wide action.

19. National information systems should be strengthened urgently. In this context we emphasize the need for effective compulsory registration of birth, marriage and death in all SAARC member States.

20. We urge that a nutrition surveillance system be established and programmes and strategies for vastly improving the nutrition status be implemented.

21. Member States should recognize the primary importance of the family and the household in the provision of services to children.

22. The intersecting needs of women and children and the contribution of women to the survival of the family should be recognized. Member States should therefore develop programmes for improving the situation of the girl child and the status of women in their countries while moving towards elimination of all forms of discrimination against women by empowering them.

23. We urge a holistic approach, through converging services, taking full advantage of the interlinkages between the goals.

RESOURCES

24. It is imperative that current levels of budgetary allocations for the social sector be enhanced. Norms could be evolved for determining the proportion of social sector investment in overall development outlay.

25. The first claim on resources should be the essential needs of children. Investment in children should be a non-negotiable political commitment.

26. The unproductive and wasteful drain of scarce resources on armaments and conflicts eats into national budgets and worsens the condition of children; it must therefore be avoided.

27. External resources, financial and technical, should be mobilized wherever appropriate for achieving the goals for children under the national plans of action.

28. The private sector should be encouraged to support community initiatives in the provision of facilities for children, as a part of its social responsibility.

FOLLOW-UP

29. This resolution draws upon the reports of the working groups on the seven themes. The recommendations of these reports may be taken up for implementation by member States, wherever appropriate:

- Child survival and safe motherhood (including small family);

- Mother and child nutrition;

- Basic education;

- Safe water, sanitation and the environment;

- The rights of the child;

- Socio-political strategy to achieve the goals;

- Poverty reduction and economic base for the family.

30. We express our appreciation to His Excellency Ranasinghe Premadasa, President of Sri Lanka, for his inspiring address and for providing guidance on measures to be taken for the survival, protection and development of children and mothers of the region. We also welcome the statement of Mr. James P. Grant, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the support extended by UNICEF in making this conference possible. We also express our gratitude for the warm and gracious hospitality extended by the Government and people of Sri Lanka.

31. This resolution is submitted for endorsement by the Seventh SAARC Summit in Dhaka in December 1992.

32. We call upon the member States - their Governments, political representatives, non-governmental organizations, communities and professionals to join hands in a movement for and with the children to enhance the physical, mental and moral quality of their lives.